

Phonics and spelling

OUR APPROACH

At La Fontaine Academy, we take a linguistic approach to phonics. Humans have been communicating orally for approximately 150,000 years, whereas we have only been using written symbols for approximately 5,000 years; phonics is the code that helps us to bridge between spoken and written forms of communication. By teaching phonics in a systematic way, we are enabling our children to read the written word and then successfully write their own thoughts and ideas, allowing them to communicate effectively. By taking a whole-school approach to phonics, and not limiting this vital knowledge to early years and key stage one, we are continually supporting our children to write accurately using increasingly complex vocabulary.

Linguistic Phonics teaches the concept that all sounds can be spelled; therefore, we do not promote silent letters, magic letters, or memorising whole words by sight. We appreciate parental support and ask that you read with your children in this way, encouraging children to use phonics to read and spell any word.

For example, we would never ask children to memorise the word 'was'. We would teach: <w> represents /w/ (as in wet) <o> represents /o/ (as in on) <s> represents /z/ (as in zoo)

Our teachers receive training to deliver the Sounds-Write phonics programme. Sounds-Write takes children through systematic, incremental steps to teach children the 44 sounds in the English language and their multiple spellings. You can complete a free online course, written by Sounds-Write, to help you support your child at home: <https://www.udemy.com/course/help-your-child-to-read-and-write/>

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the children start with the Initial Code. This teaches them that letters represent sounds, and a sound may be spelled by 1 or 2 letters. They begin with CVC words (e.g. sit, bag, vet). When all single-letter spellings have been taught, they discuss double consonant spellings (e.g. pull, miss, buzz) before learning spellings with two different letters (e.g. ch in chip, sh in ship). Children move from simple three letter words to longer words (e.g. must, stop, clump, scrunch). Our Reception classes are stocked with lots of books that contain only the Initial Code, and the children feel so successful when they read their books.

In Key Stage 1, children learn more one, two, three and four letter spellings of sounds. They also learn that one sound can be represented by multiple spellings. For example, all of these words contain different spellings of the sound /ae/: 'play', 'great', 'rain' and 'cake'. They also learn the concept that one spelling can represent multiple sounds. For example, <ea> represents the /ae/ sound in 'steak' and the /ee/ sound in 'clean'. This is called the Extended Code.

Running parallel to the Extended Code, Key Stage 1 children are taught to apply phonics at the Polysyllabic Level (words with 2 or more syllables). This stage is essential as an estimated 80% of words in the English language are polysyllabic.

From September 2020, children in Key Stage 2 will continue to explore the Extended Code and use their polysyllabic strategies to read and spell. Rather than teach specific spelling rules, teachers will teach the spellings and word lists in the National Curriculum through phonics. For example, science, arrive, describe, bicycle, and island all contain the common sound of /ie/. In addition to phonics, children are introduced to prefixes and suffixes to help develop their understanding of what words mean.

Teachers support new arrivals to the school by taking them through the Initial and Extended Code.

Our reason for taking this approach

The rationale for Linguistic Phonics, and the Sounds-Write programme that we use, is that children are taught to understand the relationship between spoken language and written words. It starts with what the children acquire naturally, spoken language, and teaches them the relationship between sounds and the spellings that represent them. Teaching children to read through Linguistic Phonics allows them to develop their reading and writing skills; this supports children in learning to put sounds together (blending) for reading, separate words into their sounds (segmenting) for spelling and swap sounds in and out of words (manipulating) to develop accuracy in reading and spelling.